

1 WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of exercising access control over television programs comprising the steps of:

5 storing a first password;
entering a criterion for blocking a television program from being viewed;
displaying a plurality of television program listings on a screen;
selecting one of the displayed listings for viewing or recording;
requesting a viewer to input a password if the selected program meets the blocking
10 criterion; and

unblocking the selected program that meets the blocking criterion so it can be viewed or recorded if the viewer inputs a password that matches the first password responsive to the request.

15 2. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion comprises:
displaying on the screen a list of criteria; and
selecting the criterion to enter from the list of criteria.

20 3. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion comprises:
displaying on the screen a prompt to the viewer to enter a password;
displaying on the screen a list of criteria if the viewer inputs a password that matches the first password responsive to the prompt;
selecting the criterion to enter from the list of criteria;
removing the list of criteria from the screen after the criterion has been entered; and
25 preventing selection of another criterion until a matching password is input.

4. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion enters a program rating.

30 5. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion enters a channel identification.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of displaying a lock symbol next to the channel identification in the program listings.

35 7. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion enters a time period.

1 8. The method of claim 1, in which the step of entering a criterion enters a spending
limit for pay-per-view programs.

5 9. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of tuning to the selected
program for viewing or recording if the selected program does not meet the blocking criterion.

 10. The method of claim 1, in which the unblocking step comprises the step of
unblocking all of the programs.

10 11. The method of claim 1, in which the step of unblocking the selected program
comprises verifying the password and preventing the viewer from entering the password for a
predetermined period of time if the password was entered incorrectly for a predetermined number
of attempts.

15 12. A parental control system comprising:
 a display screen;
 an input device for entering a first password and a criterion for blocking television
programs from being viewed;
 a display processor for displaying a plurality of television program listings on the
20 screen;
 a pointing device for selecting one of the displayed listings for viewing or
recording;
 a pop up window for prompting a viewer to enter a second password if the selected
program meets the blocking criterion; and
25 a processor for unblocking the selected program that meets the blocking criterion
so it can be viewed or recorded if the viewer enters a second password that matches the first
password.

30 13. The system of claim 12, in which the display processor displays on the screen a list
of criteria if the viewer enters a password that matches the first password and processes a selected
criterion from the list of criteria.

35 14. The system of claim 12, in which the display processor displays on the screen a list
of criteria; and the processor processes a selected criterion from the list of criteria and prevents
selection of another criterion until a matching password is entered.

 15. The system of claim 12, in which the input device enters a program rating as a
criterion.

1 16. The system of claim 12, in which the input device enters a channel identification
as a criterion.

5 17. The system of claim 16, in which the display processor further displays a lock
symbol next to the channel identification in the program listings.

 18. The system of claim 12, in which the input device enters a time period as a
criterion.

10 19. The system of claim 12, in which the input device enters a spending limit for pay-
per-view programs as a criterion.

15 20. The system of claim 12, in which the processor verifies the password and prevents
the viewer from entering the password for a predetermined period of time if the password was
entered incorrectly for a predetermined number of attempts.

20 21. An interactive program guide including a parental control system comprising:
 a display screen;
 a memory for storing a first password;
 an input device for entering a criterion for blocking television programs from being
viewed;
 means for displaying a plurality of television program listings on a screen;
 means for selecting one of the displayed listings for viewing or recording;
 means for requesting a viewer to input a password if the selected program meets
25 the blocking criterion; and
 means for unblocking the selected program that meets the blocking criterion so it
can be viewed or recorded if the viewer inputs a password that matches the first password
responsive to the request.

30 22. The guide of claim 21, in which the input device enters a program rating as a
criterion.

35 23. The guide of claim 21, in which the input device enters a channel identification as
a criterion.

 24. The guide of claim 16, in which the display processor further displays a lock
symbol next to the channel identification in the program listings.

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